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ABSTRACT

In a study of 404 University of Maryland, College Park, incoming freshmen who complete an anonymous poll regarding their behavior and attitudes toward drugs, approximately 60 percent reported using marihuana. Thirty-five percent said they used it once a month or more. Hashish had been sampled by about one-third of the freshmen, with 10 percent using it once a month or more. About 15 percent acknowledged having used cocaine, speed, downers, and PCP; however, fewer than five percent reported using these substances once a month or more often. DMT, heroin, mescaline, and LSD had been tried by five percent or less of the freshmen respondents, and monthly or more frequent usage of these substances was reported by fewer than one percent of those sampled. Alcoholic beverages were the most frequently used substances. Over 90 percent of the incoming freshmen had drunk beer, wine, or hard liquor, and over half drank once a month or more frequently. Cigarettes had been tried by about 48 percent of the sample, which was roughly equivalent to the percentage who had tried marihuana. Twenty-two percent continued using cigarettes once a month or more often. The most frequently cited reasons for drinking alcoholic beverages were to get drunk, to relieve boredom, and to be more friendly. For other substances, the most frequent reason was to get high; the only exception was cigarette smoking, which was done to relieve general anxiety, tension, nervousness, and irritability. (Author/LB)

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A NEW LOOK AT FRESHMAN ATTITUDES AND BEHAVIOR TOWARD DRUGS

Lydia Y. Minatoya and William E. Sedlacek

Research Report # 16-79

COUNSELING CENTER
UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND
COLLEGE PARK, MARYLAND

A NEW LOOK AT FRESHMAN ATTITUDES AND BEHAVIOR TOWARD DRUGS

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Summary

Four hundred and four incoming freshmen at the University of Maryland, College Park (UMCP), completed an anonymous poll regarding their behavior and attitudes toward drugs. Approximately 60% of the freshmen sampled had used Marijuana, with 35% using it once a month or more frequently. Hashish had been sampled by about one-third of the freshmen, with 10% using it once a month or more. The incidence of using other illicit drugs was lower. About 15% of the freshmen acknowledged having used cocaine, speed, downers and PCP. However fewer than 5% of the freshmen reported using these substances once a month or more often. DMT, heroin, mescaline and LSD had been tried by 5% or less of the freshmen responding to the questionnaire, and monthly or more frequent usage of these substances was reported by fewer than 1% of those sampled.

Alcoholic beverages were the most frequently used substances. Over 90% of the incoming freshmen sampled had drunk beer, wine or hard liquor, and over half drank once a month or more frequently.

Cigarettes had been tried by about 48% of the freshmen; which was roughly equivalent to the percentage who had tried marijuana. Twenty-two percent continued using cigarettes once a month or more often.

The most frequently cited reasons for drinking alcoholic beverages were: to get drunk, to relieve boredom, and to be more friendly. The most frequent response to reasons for using the other substances was to get high; with the exception of the use of cigarettes, which reportedly were used to relieve general anxiety, tension, nervousness and irritability.

During the late 1960's and early 1970's, the American college student was frequently viewed by the public as alienated from the traditional societal mores and was associated with political dissent, divergent life style, and illicit drug use. This depiction generated much alarm in higher education circles, and studies on drugs proliferated, particularly research seeking to describe the consumers of marijuana and behavior attributable to its use.

In a study conducted at a New England college, Bonier (1972) reported that 50% of the student body had used marijuana, and that the primary reason for use was its reported effects of relaxation and euphoria. Kenniston (1969) had also suggested this reason for the appeal of marijuana, noting that drug use seemed to be exceptionally high in schools which were noted for academic pressure. Focusing on the effects of drug use and its relationship with performance, Semas (1971) found no significant difference in academic performance and aspirations between users and non-users of marijuana. Indeed, Johnston (1973) found that the use of cigarettes and alcohol, but not illegal drugs, were depressers of grades. While illegal drug use was associated with lower grades by college students, Johnston's findings suggested that poor grades appeared to be a predecessor to drug use rather than drug use being a causal factor of low grades.

A prevailing stereotype of the student drug user was that drug use was an indicator of alienation from society. Hoffman, Hudson and Warner (1975) examined this assumption by studying the relationship between use of specific drugs and feelings of abnormality, powerlessness and other feelings associated with social isolation. They found no significant relationship between alienation and the use of drugs. While the mean alienation scores of non-users and users of multiple drugs were essentially the same, those who did not use illegal substances, but smoked cigarettes and/or used alcohol, were significantly more alienated than students who used only one of the illegal drugs.

Concern about campus use and mis-use of drugs needs to be recognized as legitimate and timely; and with growing recognition of the frequency of alcohol abuse and the very real hazards of cigarette smoking, the study of drugs requires a broadened definition to include legal and prescription, as well as illicit, substances.

Since 1970, undergraduate students at the University of Maryland, College Park, have been surveyed about their use or non-use of various substances. McKenzie (1970) reported the results of an anonymous questionnaire on student use and non-use of marijuana over a three-year period (1967, 1968, and 1969). He found an increased use of marijuana among undergraduate students (from 11% in 1967 to 25% in 1969), and that marijuana use was less extensive among freshmen than among seniors. Howard and Sedlacek (1975) found that over 90% of the freshmen surveyed reported having used alcoholic beverages, over half of the freshmen had smoked marijuana and tobacco, and approximately one-quarter of the freshmen had continued to use these substances at least once a week. In an attempt to trace possible trends, Howard and Sedlacek compared their data with that gathered in the two preceding years (Fago and Sedlacek, 1975; Horowitz and Sedlacek, 1973). While more students in the Howard and Sedlacek study reported having used marijuana than in the previous years' studies, they appeared less likely to be regular users.

The purpose of the present study was to continue to investigate the behavior and attitudes of University of Maryland, College Park, freshmen with respect to the use of various substances, and to investigate further the questions of which substances are used, by what types of students, and for what reasons.

Method

An anonymous questionnaire was administered to a representative group of 404 incoming freshmen at the University of Maryland, College Park (UMCP). The sample was 48% male and 52% female; 54% reported their current age as 18 years old,

with an additional 40% reporting they were 17 years old.

Data were analyzed descriptively by frequency and percent. The attitude items were dichotomized into responses by "users of illegal substances" and "others" (users of alcohol and tobacco and non-users), and were analyzed by t-tests and discriminant analyses.

Results

Table 1 presents the frequency of use of the fourteen substances studied. Approximately 60% of the freshmen sampled had used marijuana, with 35% using it once a month or more frequently. Hashish had been sampled by about one-third of the freshmen, with 10% using it once a month or more. The incidence of using other illicit drugs was lower. About 15% of the freshmen acknowledged having used cocaine, speed, downers and PCP. However, fewer than 5% of the freshmen reported using these substances once a month or more often. DMT, heroin, mescaline and LSD had been tried by 5% or less of the freshmen responding to the questionnaire, and monthly or more frequent use of these substances was reported by fewer than 1% of those sampled.

Alcoholic beverages were the most frequently used substances. Over 90% of the incoming freshmen sampled had drunk beer, wine or hard liquor, and over half drank once a month or more frequently.

Cigarettes had been tried by about 48% of the freshmen; which was roughly equivalent to the percentage who had tried marijuana. Twenty-two percent continued using cigarettes once a month or more often.

As displayed in Table 2, the most frequently cited reasons for drinking alcoholic beverages were to get drunk, to relieve boredom, and to be more friendly. The most frequent response to reasons for using the other substances was to get high, with the exception of the use of cigarettes, which reportedly were used to relieve general anxiety, tension, nervousness and irritability. "No desire to experience effects" was the predominant reason cited for not using

illicit drugs. Other reasons cited were "reports of harmful physical effects," and "reports of harmful psychological effects." "Reports of harmful physical effects" was also the most frequently cited reason for not using cigarettes, while the use of alcoholic beverages seemed proscribed through "not liking the taste" of the beverages.

Six percent of the freshmen reported having first drunk alcoholic beverages with friends at age ten or younger, 19% between the ages of eleven to fourteen, 55% between the ages of fourteen and seventeen, and 12% at seventeen or older. Seven percent reported never having drunk alcoholic beverages. The places most frequently cited for drinking with friends were at parties (46%), in restaurants or lounges (13%), or at home (12%).

Seventeen percent of the freshmen reported that they first smoked marijuana at age sixteen, 13% first smoked marijuana at age fifteen, 10% at age fourteen, and 7% at age thirteen, while the rest had not tried marijuana. The places most frequently cited for smoking marijuana were at parties (21%), at home (10%), and in public or semi-public places (i.e., cars, sporting events, concerts).

As can be seen in Table 4, users of illegal substances and those using legal substances or refraining from any usage were found to be significantly different on several attitudinal items. A discriminant analysis conducted on the attitude items revealed that most of the predictability was accounted for by the items: "The use of marijuana should have just about the same legal status as the use of alcohol or tobacco " (item 10); "I would like to have just about the same kind of life for myself as my parents' have had" (item 11); "On more than once occasion I have driven a car when I was high" (item 24); and "On more than one occasion I have driven a car when I was drunk" (item 25).

Results of this study appear to be consistent with existing research. It is hoped that continuing this research over a period of time will help to determine trends and dimensions in student attitudes and behavior towards drugs. Planning and program development can then be based on extrapolation of data rather than emotions-limited information.

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Table 1.

Frequency of Drug Use

Substance	% Never Used	Frequency of Use (N=404)	
		% Used once, twice a few times	% Used once a month or more
Beer	6	32	62
Cigarettes	40	38	22
Cocaine	86	10	4
DMT	95	4	0.3
Downers	86	14	1
Hard liquor	21	40	39
Hashish	66	24	9
Heroin	98	0.7	0.5
LSD	93	5	0.9
Marijuana	39	26	35
Mescaline	96	3	0.9
PCP	83	14	2
Speed	84	12	3
Wine	8	42	50

Table 2.

Reasons for Use of Drugs

Substance	Most Frequent Response	2nd most frequent response	3rd most frequent response
Beer	to relieve boredom	to get drunk	to be more friendly
Cigarettes	I don't use it	relieve general anxiety	to relieve boredom
Cocaine	I don't use it	get high, feel good	make a good mood last, experience things more vividly
DMT	I don't use it	get high	*
Downers	I don't use it	get high	relieve general anxiety
Hard liquor	I don't use it	get drunk	to get high, feel good
Hashish	I don't use it	get high	to relieve boredom
Heroin	I don't use it	get high	*
LSD	I don't use it	get high	experience things more vividly
Marijuana	I don't use it	get high	relieve general anxiety
Mescaline	I don't use it	get high	*
PCP	I don't use it	get high	*
Speed	I don't use it	get high	make good mood last longer
Wine	I don't use it	get drunk	get high

* Responses scattered after second most frequent

Table 3.

Reasons for Not Using Drugs

Substance	Most Frequent Response	2nd Most Frequent Response	3rd Most Frequent Response
Beer	I use it	Don't like taste	No desire to experience effects
Cigarettes	Reports of harmful physical effects	No desire to experience effects	I use it
Cocaine	No desire to experience effects	Reports of harmful physical effects	Report of harmful psychological effects
DMT	No desire to experience effects	Reports of harmful physical effects	Reports of harmful psychological effects
Downers	No desire to experience effects	Reports of harmful physical effects	Reports of harmful psychological effects
Hard liquor	I use it	No desire to experience effects	Don't like taste
Hashish	No desire to experience effects	I use it	Reports of harmful physical effects
Heroin	No desire to experience effects	Reports of harmful physical effects	Reports of harmful psychological effects
LSD	No desire to experience effects	Reports of harmful psychological effects	Reports of harmful physical effects
Marijuana	No desire to experience effects	I use it	Reports of harmful psychological effects
Mescaline	No desire to experience effects	Reports of harmful physical effects	Reports of harmful psychological effects
PCP	No desire to experience effects	Reports of harmful physical effects	Reports of harmful psychological effects
Speed	No desire to experience effects	Reports of harmful physical effects	Reports of harmful psychological effects
Wine	I use it	Don't like taste	No desire to experience effects

Table 4.

Means[1] and Standard Deviations of Attitude Items for Users and Nonusers of Illegal Substances

Items	Users of Illegal Substances		Nonusers of Illegal Substances[2]	
	Means	S.D.	Means	S.D.
10. The use of marijuana should have the same legal status as the use of alcohol and tobacco.	2.23*	1.19	3.41	1.26
11. I would like to have just about the same kind of life for myself as my parents have had.	3.66*	1.02	3.31	1.08
12. I don't know exactly what I want to do after I graduate from college.	3.10*	1.23	3.41	1.28
13. My parents would prefer that I drink alcoholic beverages rather than smoke marijuana.	2.27	1.17	2.36	1.19
14. My parents drink alcoholic beverages.	2.48	1.31	2.66	1.29
15. I expect that I will live a life style that is similar to my parents'.	3.44*	1.19	3.19	1.11
16. My parents smoke marijuana.	4.54	1.07	4.69	.91
17. Sometimes I feel anxious about succeeding in college.	1.83	.95	2.01	.93
18. I usually do more work in my classes than is required to get by.	3.06*	1.14	2.76	1.16
19. I expect the University will be an important source of stimulation for me.	1.97	.86	2.07	.85
20. I expect to feel a sense of belonging and an identification here.	2.24	1.02	2.41	.95
21. For me, college is mainly a practical matter; with a college degree I can pursue my career goals.	2.51	1.16	2.39	1.10
22. I suppose I take the practical benefits of college for granted; I am more concerned about the less tangible things such as my development as a person.	2.85	1.04	2.91	1.00
23. I expect to maintain at least a B average through college.	1.95	.88	1.89	.96

Table 4. (continued)

Means[1] and Standard Deviations of Attitude Items for Users and Nonusers of Illegal Substances

Items	Users of Illegal Substances		Nonusers of Illeg. Substances[2]	
	Means	S.D.	Means	S.D.
24. On more than one occasion I have driven a car when I was high.	3.02*	1.60	4.68	.90
25. On more than one occasion I have driven a car when I was drunk.	2.84*	1.57	4.18	1.34

[1] Scale is from 1= Strongly agree to 5 = Strongly disagree

[2] Includes users of wine and beer

* Means significantly different, using t-test at .05 level.